

ALDEN FAMILY

12

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, August 11, 1977.

They Came From Afar

Over 150 Alden Kindred attended the Kindred's annual meeting Saturday at the Alden House, coming from as far as California and Florida. The youngest was 4 months old and the oldest, 92, was Alice Parker Badger of Quincy, who was born in Duxbury and lived here until she was married. Her niece, Mrs. Arthur Rogde of Washington St., and Winchester, attended the meeting with her daughter, Phyllis Gleason, and the Gleason boys, Alexander and Arthur, all of Winchester.

Dan Pearce, president of the Kindred, gave the following address:

The Courtship of Miles Standish. Did this story actually happen? We don't know, but it makes a beautiful story, doesn't it? If it did happen, it is fortunate for us that it turned out the way it did or most of us wouldn't be here today.

This past May, I was visiting a friend in the Jordan Hospital in Plymouth. She asked me to visit a patient in the next room because he had written a poem entitled: **The Courtship of Miles Standish.** The gentleman's name is David Brewer, and he lives in Plymouth, and he was invited to attend this meeting. Is David Brewer in the audience?

He recited the poem from memory while I scribbled it on a piece of paper. Here it is:

The Courtship of Miles Standish

By David Brewer
(With apologies to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and the Alden Kindred).

Priscilla Mullens strode the strand
Miles Standish did adore her
He yearned to ask for the maiden's hand
But feared to come before her.

And so he said to his friend John
"With worriment I'm laden
I wish for me you'd call upon
Squire Mullen's charming maiden."

John Alden loved Priscilla too
The mission was outlandish
But what could poor John Alden do;
He spoke for Miles Standish.

Priscilla gave to John her smiles
And said when he was through
"I do admire your Captain Miles
But I'd rather marry you."

To Miles then John Alden flew
To Standish then said he
"I proposed to her for you
And she proposed to me."

"Take her than if she's for thee"

Miles Standish promptly stated
"And grieve ye not one wit for me
For ye are rightly mated."

John Alden then betook a bride
He and Priscilla wed
Across the bay they did reside
And a happy life they led.

Longfellow's poem is known by most school children and adults. Some believe he exercised a considerable amount of poetic license in relating the story, and we know this to be true in some of his details. For example, John Alden was supposed to have carried his bride home on the back of a bull after their marriage in 1623. However, Bradford records that in the ship "Charity" there came to Plymouth a bull and 3 heifers which was "the beginning of any cattle of that kind in this land." This was in 1624 or the year after the marriage.

But how about the courtship?

You may be interested in a little book entitled **A Collection of American Epitaphs and Inscriptions with Occasional Notes** by the Rev. Timothy Alden, published in 1814. In this account, the story Longfellow tells in poetry Timothy Alden tells in prose. It is as follows:

"In a very short time after the decease of Mrs. Standish, the captain was led to think, that, if he could obtain Miss Priscilla Mullins, a daughter of Mr. William Mullins, the breach in his family would be happily repaired. He, therefore, according to the custom of those times, sent to ask Mr. Mullins' permission to visit his daughter. John Alden, the messenger, went and faithfully communicated the wishes of the captain. The old gentleman did not object, as he might have done, on account of the recency of captain Standish's bereavement. He said it was perfectly agreeable to him, but the young lady must also be consulted. The damsel was then called into the room, and John Alden, who is said to have been a man of most excellent form with a fair and ruddy complexion, arose, and, in a very courteous and prepossessing manner, delivered his errand. Miss Mullins listened with respectful attention, and at last, after a considerable pause, fixing her eyes upon him, with an open and pleasant countenance, said, "Prithee, John, why do you not speak for yourself?" He blushed, and bowed, and took his leave, but with a look, which indicated more than his diffidence would permit him otherwise to express."

Longfellow and Timothy were descendants of John and Priscilla. In 1814, Longfellow was a child of 7, so we can't say he made up the story of the courtship. Do you think the story could have been passed along by word of mouth from one generation to the next? Do you think Miles Standish was in love with Priscilla?

If you remember, Miles had recently lost his wife. He had a family and needed a woman in his home to take care of his house, cook his meals, and to take care of him.

Why would Priscilla choose John Alden?

Captain Standish was a very important man in the colony. He was the military leader, a

admiral

fearless, skilled soldier. Physically, he was short, he had red hair, he was bandy or bowlegged and he was about 35 years older than Priscilla. On the other hand, John Alden was single, he had a fair complexion, he was tall, and "said to have been a man of most excellent form," and he was about 21 or 22 or about a year older than Priscilla.

Now, as you know, poets, historians, and writers are not always factual and are sometimes opinionated. The Rev. Timothy is no exception. Squire Mullins died in late February of the first winter (1621) so, as one historian points out, John Alden couldn't have called on Squire Mullins because Mullins was dead.

I have enjoyed thinking about the courtship and hope you have, too. There is one fact of which we can be sure; John Alden married Priscilla Mullins.

But how about the courtship? Do you think it really happened? I know what I think -- what do you think?